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Christianity as Public Religion: A Justification for using a Christian Sociological Approach for Studying the Social Scientific Aspects of Sport

Abstract

The vast majority of social scientific studies of sport have been secular in nature and/or have tended to ignore the importance of studying the religious aspects of sport. In light of this, Shilling and Mellor (2014) have sought to encourage sociologists of sport not to divorce the 'religious' and the 'sacred' from their studies. In response to this call, the goal of the current essay is to explore how the conception of Christianity as 'public religion' can be utilised to help justify the use of a Christian sociological approach for studying the social scientific aspects of sport. After making a case for Christianity as public religion, we conclude that many of the sociological issues inherent in modern sport are an indirect result of its increasing secularisation and argue that this justifies the need for a Christian sociological approach. We encourage researchers to use the Bible, the tools of Christian theology and sociological concepts together, so to inform analyses of modern sport from a Christian perspective.

Introduction

Despite the fact that sport and religion have clearly had a relationship for over 3000 years (Watson and Parker 2013), the vast majority of social scientific studies of sport have been secular in nature and/or have tended to ignore the importance of studying the religious aspects of sport. This has been previously noted by Shilling and Mellor (2014, 351) who argued that, 'analysing sport purely as a secular phenomenon, and marginalizing its religious significance, is potentially antagonistic to a broader attempt to grasp its societal importance'. They also criticise the vast majority of existing sociology of sport literature written over the last two decades when they claim, 'studies focused purely on the secular dimensions of sport can be unhelpfully narrow' (Shilling and Mellor 2014, 352). Shilling and Mellor (2014, 352) went on to develop what they describe as 'a novel theoretical account of sport's centrality to social life, attentive to its secular, religious and sacred aspects'.

Despite aiming to highlight that a secular bias exists within the sociology of sport and subsequently encouraging scholars not to divorce the 'religious' and the 'sacred' from their studies, Shilling and Mellor (2014) only drew upon secularist theorists – Emile Durkheim and Max Weber - to guide their own analytical framework and conclusions. This is not so much a criticism of Shilling and Mellor, but more a limitation of the discipline of sociology as a whole considering that the majority of the social theorists utilised therein (and concomitantly in the sub-discipline of sports sociology) are secularists. Gibbons (2017) highlighted this issue and briefly introduced the potential contribution of some Christian sociological perspectives for those interested in the social-scientific study of sport to explore. The goal of the current essay is to build upon the work of Shilling and Mellor (2014) and Gibbons (2017) through exploring how the conception of Christianity as 'public religion' justifies the use of a Christian sociological approach for studying the social scientific aspects of sport. In the first section, we provide a brief overview of the existing and emerging literature that has examined the sport-Christianity symbiosis through both a social scientific and a theological

lens. This provides important contextual background information with regard to the conceptual, theoretical and empirical basis for our argument. In the second section of this essay, we consider the rise of what sociologists call 'public religion' before discussing arguments for Christianity as public religion in the third section. In the final section, we argue that many of the sociological issues inherent in modern sport are an indirect result of its increasing secularisation and this justifies the need for a Christian-centred approach.

Sports and Christianity Research: A Brief Overview

The office of the 'Pontifical Council for Culture' within the Vatican, recently hosted an international conference entitled, *Sport at the Service of Humanity* (2016, 4-7 October). Given the profile of the opening speakers—Pope Francis, the Archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby, the President of the International Olympic Committee, Thomas Bach, and the General Secretary of the UN, Ban Ki-moon–one might conclude that the sport-faith field has *arrived*. This conjecture is buttressed by the recent *Inaugural Global Congress on Sports and Christianity* (2016, 24-28 August, York St John University, UK), from which, a number of journal special editions and books emanated (Parker, Watson and White 2016; Adogame, Watson and Parker 2017).[1] These developments, we argue, are demonstrative of the growing interest (and importance) of the relationship between sport and the Christian faith in both ecclesiological and academic forums. The recent launch of the *Centre for Sport and Religion* at the University of Tennessee, US, alongside a significant corpus of scholarship that has developed over the last decade, further illustrates this point (see for instance: Alpert 2015; Baker 2007; Blaizer 2015; Ellis 2014; Harvey 2014; Hoffman 2010; Kelly 2012; Parry et al. 2007, 2011; Watson and Parker 2013, 2014, 2015).

Substantive scholarship in the field of Sports and Christianity finds its roots in Michael Novak's seminal text *The Joy of Sports* (1967/2004). Novak, a world-renowned Catholic lay theologian and former US ambassador, provided an interdisciplinary work (including some sociological theory) on the relationship between sports and the Christian faith. His central thesis that sports had a religious dimension and that they should not be politicized challenged neo-Marxist critiques of professional sports that became popular during that era (Brohm 1978; Hoch 1972; Rigauer 1982; Scott 1971). These Neo-Marxist critiques, which are still popular today, maintain that modern professional sports are inherently political as they embody capitalism and its value system that is fundamentally underpinned by exploitation, alienation and oppression and needs to be dismantled, re-structured and/or used as a site for resistance. Novak emphasised sport's religious and non-political character disputing and confronting this dominant secularist critique of sport. Subsequently, during the next three decades, a small number of sport scholars began to explore various aspects of the relationships between sports and Christianity (see Hoffman 1976; 1985; 1986; 1991; 1992; Higgs 1983; 1985; 1990; 1995).

A central genre of scholarship that emerged during this period examined how sport might be viewed *as* a religion in itself. Arguably, the foundational work in this area was Harry Edwards' (1973, 8) book chapter in which he concluded: 'If there is a universal popular religion in America it is to be found within the institution of sport'. Using the structural functionalist approach of Émile Durkheim and Talcott Parsons, Edwards and others described how modern sports functioned like a religion (see Birrell 1981; Price 1984; 1991; 1994; 2001; 2005). While it is a hotly debated concept, both in the discipline of sociology and theology, the secularization of Western Europe over the last 200 years is often cited as the principle reason given to explain why the loss of traditional religious liturgies in culture has led to sports—with their ritual, communal, aesthetic, transcendent, symbolic, mythical,

ascetic and heroic structures—being championed as the 'new' religion. More recent scholarship—rooted largely in Bellah's (1967) seminal work—rehearses this well-used and general line of reasoning by focussing on how sport can act as: a 'cultural religion' (Albanese 1981); a 'secular religion' (Alomes 1994; Liponski 2009); a 'surrogate religion' (Coles 1975; Percy and Taylor 1997); a 'quasi-religion' (Dunning 1986); a 'folk-religion' (Mathisen 2005; 2001); and, a 'civil religion' (Scholes and Sassower 2013).

Another scholarly focus in the sports-Christianity field over the last four decades has been the use of Max Weber's rationalisation thesis to critique and analyse the structural and fiscal dynamics of sport through history. The historian, Allen Guttmann, provided the foundational (and now seminal) Weberian treatment of sport in his book, *From Ritual to Record* (1978/2004), which has been followed by related texts (Overman 1997; 2011). In tracking the conceptual, ritualistic and economic aspects of sports down the centuries, Guttmann argues that a 'ludic diffusion' has taken place, resulting in the loss of the play ethic (due primarily to the development of a Protestant work ethic and rise/dominance of the free-market) in modern professional sports. In his book, *Games and Empires*: *Modern Sports and Cultural Imperialism*, Guttmann (1994) nicely captures the central tenets of modern sports which undoubtedly imbibe the 'win at all costs' doctrine that often leads to many ethical quandaries for the sociologist, ethicist or theologian to examine. He describes in detail how the character of Western modern sports has evolved from the industrial, scientific, capitalist, imperial, and cultural developments of the 19th and 20th centuries. In so doing, he identifies seven defining characteristics of 'modern sport'. Six of these, especially the 'secularisation' of modern sport (which we will return to in our conclusion), are particularly helpful in illustrating the need for a Christian Sociology for the social scientific study of sport:

- SECULARISM: despite their tendency to become ritualized and to arouse strong emotions, modern sports are not related—as pre-modern sports often were—to some transcendent realm of the numinous or sacred;
- BUREAUCRATIZATION: modern sports are typically governed neither by priestly conclaves nor by ritual adepts, but rather by national and transnational bureaucracies (of which the United States Olympic Committee and the *Fédération Internationale de Football Association* are examples);
- SPECIALIZATION: many modern sports have evolved, like rugby, soccer, baseball, and American football, from earlier, less differentiated games, and many, like cricket, baseball, and football, have a gamut of specialized roles and playing positions;
- RATIONALIZATION: the rules of modern sports are constantly scrutinized and undergo frequent revision from a means-ends point of view; athletes train scientifically, employ technologically advanced equipment, and strive for the most efficient employment of their skills;
- QUANTIFICATION: in modern sports, as in almost every other aspect of our lives, we live in a world of numbers; the 'stats' have become an apparently indispensable part of the game;
- THE OBSESSION WITH RECORDS: the unsurpassed quantified achievement, which is what we mean by "record" in this uniquely modern usage, is a constant challenge to all who strive to surpass it and thereby to achieve a modern version of immortality. (Guttmann 1994, 2-3)

In light of these structural and philosophical changes in sports over time, it could be argued that for some athletes and fans, modern sport, especially the dimension of winning with its many potential extrinsic rewards, has become a 'ritualised obsession', and even a vehicle for

'immortalising the self' (Grimshaw 2000; Schmitt and Leonard 1986)—what the Bible and theologians refer to as 'idolatry' (Col. 3:5, Gal. 5:20; Watson and White 2012). Due to limited space, we are unable to elaborate in detail upon Guttmann's framework herein but we argue that it provides sociologists, psychologists, ethicists and theologians with numerous topics to address.

Watson and Parker's (2014) recent systematic review of literature and practical initiatives on the topic of sports and Christianity identified a number of existing and emerging topics that were ripe for investigation by sociologists, psychologists, ethicists and theologians. These included: prayer and ritual; health and well-being; violence; play; an endless number of ethical issues (including doping and genetic enhancement); chaplaincy and ministry; the role of Church and parachurch organisations; spectatorship; aesthetics and risk in extreme-sports; economics in governance and administration; physical and intellectual disability; embodiment and a host of sociological categories—race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, etc. A key finding of the review was that while scholarship in the field was growing fast, there was a paucity of qualitative and quantitative empirical studies. As Watson and Parker's review indicates, there has been a significant upsurge of specific publications in theology (see Brock 2012; Dailey 2016; Ellis 2014; Harvey 2013; 2014; Parker and Watson 2014; Parker and Weir 2012; White 2012;), the philosophy of sport (see Kretchmar 2011; 2012; Kretchmar and Watson 2017; Scarpa and Carraro 2011; Twietmeyer 2008; 2009; White 2012; 2013) and the sociology of sport (see Gibbons and Braye, 2017; Gibbons 2017; Meyer, Wynveen and Gallucci 2015; Shilling and Mellor 2014; Stevenson 1991; 1997). This is in addition to multiple edited monographs and anthologies that explore the relationship between sports and Christianity (examples of which are cited at the start of this section).

To summarise this very brief overview of the sport-Christianity field, we are confident alongside leading social scientists who have reflected on sports (see Shilling and

Mellor 2014), to assert that there is great potential for a Christian sociological approach within the social scientific study of sport. In the following section we consider the rise of what sociologists call 'public religion' which we go on to argue can be used to justify a Christian sociological approach to the social scientific study of sport.

The rise of 'public religion'[2]

From the latter part of the 19th century, the likes of Auguste Comte, Karl Marx, Max Weber, and Émile Durkheim were establishing sociology as a secular discipline. However, from the very beginning, these secular theorists were interested in studying the topic of religion:

> The study of religion played a major role in classical sociology from Karl Marx's theory of alienation and fetishism of commodities, to Max Weber's work on the Protestant sects and the rise of capitalism … to Emile Durkheim's work on the sacred and profane dichotomy. (Turner 2014, 772)

The earliest of these secularist 'founding fathers' of sociology, Comte, famously argued that sociology was 'the new religion' (Brewer 2007, 10); yet Durkheim argued that 'religion' and the 'sacred' persist in modern societies as they play a role in maintaining social order. Weber's rationalisation thesis suggested that the increasing rationalisation of modern societies diminished the significance of religion and the sacred, whereas Marx criticised religion for diverting the attention of the masses from political engagement and revolutionary action, famously referring to religion as 'an opiate of the masses'.

The dominance of secularization and the celebration of pluralism meant that after the Second World War 'religion...tended to be restricted to the private sphere' in most industrialized Western nations (Brewer 2007, 9). The secularization thesis that dominated sociological debate on religion was widely accepted and undisputed until Peter Berger (1967) predicted that religion would be pushed away from the public sphere and into the private sphere as a result of socioeconomic advancement in increasingly secular Western societies. Thomas Luckmann (1967) asserted that religion would not necessarily decline but would become invisible from the public sphere and unrecognizable as Western modernity advanced. Bryan Wilson (1977) agreed that religion would cease to have impact in the public sphere and would increasingly be regarded as a matter of choice. Thus, the privatization thesis became a dominant argument within sociological analyses of religion and redefined the well-established secularization thesis by referring to an individual privatization of religion rather than outright decline.

Since 1989 and the fall of the Berlin Wall, religion has re-emerged into public life in Eastern and Central Europe, and it was in the early 1990s that the place of religion in the public sphere began to become a prominent and hotly debated issue within the sociological mainstream. This public debate was intensified by the terrorism caused by Islamic extremists, starting with the infamous 9/11 attack on the 'Twin Towers' in New York in 2001 followed by other devastating bombings in Europe and beyond enacted by Islamic extremist groups. Turner (2014, 774–775) states that there has been a 'revival of the sociology of religion in the late 20th and early 21st century', which is 'associated with growing recognition of the importance of religion in public life'. José Casanova's (1994) seminal text *Public Religions in the Modern World* challenged the privatization thesis. Casanova (1994, 5) argued that 'we are witnessing the de-privatization of religion' within which the private sphere becomes re-politicized and the spheres of economics and politics become re-normativized. He contended

that ‘religious traditions throughout the world are refusing to accept the marginal and privatized role which theories of modernity as well as theories of secularization had reserved for them’ (Casanova 1994, 5). Thus, Casanova refuted the notion that the privatization of religion was a necessity in modern societies arguing that religion has maintained a public role.

In later work, Berger (1999) refuted his own privatization thesis acknowledging the de-secularization of society due to the rise in the number of religious adherent across various regions of the world. Moreover, Jürgen Habermas (2006, 2008) argued that public debate on moral issues might benefit from input from religion using the term ‘post-secular’ to describe the state of Europe, Australia, New Zealand, and Canada. He encouraged the involvement of religious viewpoints in public affairs.

The case for Christianity as public religion

Gibbons (2016) argues that from its inception 2000 years ago, the primary focus of Christianity has been the public declaration of the gospel of Jesus Christ. The Christian message or ‘gospel’ (meaning ‘good news’) according to Christian theology is that Jesus Christ died for the sins of humanity in order to save them from eternal damnation. Gibbons (2016) refers to the New Testament to demonstrate the very public nature of Jesus’ ministry on earth, starting with John the Baptist (Matt. 3:1-11; Mark 1:1-8; Luke 3:1-18; John 1:29-34) and then Jesus himself publically declaring the good news (Matt 4:12-17; Mark 1:14-15; Luke 4:14-28) and encouraging his disciples to do the same (see for example Matt. 5:14-16). Following his three-year ministry on earth recorded in the four Gospels, which ended with his resurrection from the dead and later ascension to heaven (see Matt. 28; Mark 16; Luke 24; John 20-21), the story of how the early Church began highlights the significance of the public

declaration of the gospel for the first Christians (see for example Acts 1:14-41; 6:8-7:59; 9:1-31).

In contrast to the assumed death or decline of Christianity that is said to have been occurring since the Second World War across Europe (Adair 2008), revivals of Christianity have occurred in Europe and elsewhere from the late 1940s (see Gibbons 2016). For instance, the world famous evangelist Billy Graham first visited the UK in 1954 and his mass rallies in large venues (including Wembley Stadium) were covered 'live' on television and radio, and helped spark post-war revivals of Christianity in the UK (O'Donnell 2009). The number of Christians has been expanding on a global scale since at least 1500 and at a particularly rapid rate since 1900 following the inception of the movement of Pentecostalism according to some commentators (see Goodhew 2012; Threlfall-Holmes 2012).

Brewer (2007, 7) states that there have been attempts since the late nineteenth century to consider the interface between Christianity and sociology seriously from the perspective of the Christian faith. Yet this form of sociology lies underdeveloped and has been obscured from the history of the development of the discipline of sociology (Brewer 2007, 8; Gill 2012a, 25). One of the earliest texts identified by Gibbons (2017) is *Christian Sociology* (see Stuckenberg, 1881).[3] This seminal work was written from a Liberal Protestant standpoint, which Brewer (2007, 11) states, 'has always been socially reformist and committed to social progress. This is reflected in significant philanthropy and campaigning for social reform but also in the desire to make Christianity relevant to modern society'. Despite its focus on society in the late 19th century, the following passage from Stuckenberg's (1881, 16) argument encapsulates what Christian Sociology still has the potential to do today:

> Social problems are constantly arising which should receive their solution from a Christian standpoint. Many of these problems are of vast importance, and present an inviting field for the application of the principles of the Gospel – an application that is much needed, and which promises to be fruitful of rich results. Why leave the most important civil and social questions of the day to the solutions of a worldly philosophy and of a godless political economy? Why not make the ethics of the New Testament the test of all social theories? The problems connected with education, with capital and labor, with the relations of employer and employé, problems connected with politics, and with the various social relations and social life – all should be discussed by Christians in the light of the Gospel, and should be settled according to its spirit. This is essential to social welfare.

More recent sociological books written from a Christian (Protestant evangelical) perspective began to emerge in the US in the 1970s (see for example, Campolo 1995; Fraser and Campolo 1992; Grunland and Reimer 1991; Hunter 2010; Perkins 1987; Poythress 2011; Schmidt and Heybyrne 2004; Wright 2010). These texts seek to argue that the Christian gospel message can and should be used to address the sociological issues inherent in contemporary society, yet their ideas are yet to be explored by sociologists due to the secular bias that pervades the discipline (Gibbons 2017).

The philosopher Roger Trigg (2007, 3) argues that since 'the standards of Western society have arisen from a Christian background' Christianity should have a legitimate place in public debate. Furthermore, Trigg (2007, 29) warns the following: 'If the roots of a respect for liberty, and for the valuing of toleration, are themselves nourished by the Christian tradition, then banishing that tradition from public influence could destroy the plant'.

Gibbons (2016) argued that one of the major problems in contemporary Western societies is that there is ignorance about the topic of religion. There is a tendency to lump all religions together rather than looking at the differences between different faiths. This kind of reasoning neglects the contribution that Christianity can make to public life because it regards all religions as beyond the scope of reason (Trigg 2007, 33). In contemporary Western nation-states such as the UK, USA and especially in France for example, religion and rationality are deemed separate and secular reasoning and motivation are deemed more neutral than religious reasoning and motivation. In his counter-argument against the supremacy given to secular reasoning, Trigg (2007, 40) asserts the following:

> It is a part of civic virtue only to be motivated by secular reasons. Yet the idea that there is some deep mismatch between the pursuit of political equality in a democracy, and religion as a motive force is curious. The influence of religion may not always be beneficial, but it is undeniable that many social advances have been directly motivated by Christian belief. The campaign for the abolition of slavery in the British Empire at the beginning of the nineteenth century, and the American civil rights movement in the twentieth, were both examples of reforms brought about largely by those who were explicitly inspired by Christian belief in the love of God for all. (Trigg 2007, 40)

The former Archbishop of Canterbury, Rev. Dr. Rowan Williams, gave a lecture at St. Andrew's Cathedral in Singapore in 2007 in which he made a strong case for the significant contribution Christianity has to make to issues in the public sphere. Williams (2007) referred to the rise of rational secular modern societies following the Enlightenment period and some of the negative consequences of the reliance on science and technological development above

Christian values. At the core of Williams' argument one can discern the same standpoint as that expressed by Stuckenberg (1881) over a century earlier regarding the relevance of and need for a Christian voice regarding issues of sociological importance. Williams argued that since God has created the world and every person in the world every person is unique and has a God-given calling and purpose. This motivates Christians to have reverence for every other human being out of reverence for God rather than out of some legal entitlement to human rights: 'the Christian gospel declares that there is nothing more Godlike and precious than a single human person' (Williams 2007). Williams avoids lumping all religions together and singles out Christianity as having the potential to influence society in a positive way:

> But there is an extra element brought by Christianity to the analysis of a good society…. The New Testament describes what happens when human beings are brought into relationship with Jesus Christ by faith as a community in which everyone's gifts are set free for the service of others. The community that most perfectly represents what God wants to see in the human world is one where the resources of each person are offered for every other, whether those resources are financial or spiritual or intellectual or administrative.

Williams is referring to the principles underpinning all Christian churches here and implies that the model of what the Apostle Paul refers to in the New Testament as 'the body of Christ' (see for example 1 Cor. 12) is one that society would benefit greatly from following. Williams continues by adding the following regarding the potential of contemporary societies following the Christian model:

> It is not only that the least and apparently most useless still has the dignity of having a gift and a purpose; it's also that everyone is able to give to others, to have the dignity of being a giver, being important to someone else. Instead of just a static picture of everyone having dignity, the Christian vision is dynamic—everyone engaged in building up everyone else's human life and dignity. (Williams 2007)

Williams ends his speech by summarizing the main contribution the Christian gospel message can make to the public sphere:

> It is not that the state and the laws of society must represent in all respects the commands of the gospel; it is rather that the state will become a sterile and oppressive thing unless it is continually engaged in conversation with those who speak for the gospel. That is perhaps the essence of the Christian contribution in the public sphere. It is a voice that questions from a wholly different perspective, the kind of perspective that cannot be generated by corporate self-interest. It is a conversation partner, and what has sometimes been called a critical friend to the state and its laws; it asks about the foundations of what the state takes for granted and often challenges the shallowness of a prevailing social morality; it pushes for change to make the state a little more like the community that it is itself representing, the Kingdom of God. It does not make the mistake of talking as though politics would bring the Kingdom into being on earth, but it continually seeks to make the promise of the Kingdom more concrete and visible in the common life of human beings, private and public. In short, it tells the state not that it is unimportant

> or subordinate to some higher earthly power, but just that it is relative in the perspective of God. If a certain degree of shared humility and realism is part of the life of a healthy state and society that is one of the things that Christian proclamation can offer. (Williams 2007)

Of course, not everyone agrees with Rev. Dr. Rowan Williams and Roger Trigg regarding the benefits of having a Christian voice in the public sphere. According to Trigg (2007), one of the main counter-arguments suggests religious views have been considered 'just beliefs' that cannot be trusted because they are not based on fact or evidence. This has been a specific critique made by atheist scientists who champion Charles Darwin's theory of evolution and who seem to regard his magnum opus *Origin of Species* (1859/1985) as their bible. One of the most influential recent critics of religion (particularly Christianity), who has sought to express his views in the public sphere, has been the ethologist and evolutionary biologist Richard Dawkins, currently an emeritus fellow of New College Oxford, and formerly Professor for Public Understanding of Science at Oxford until 2008. Dawkins is the author of the international bestseller *The God Delusion* (2006). In this influential book, Dawkins sought to disprove the existence of God through seeking to convince his readers that Darwin's process of national selection is scientifically demonstrable and that faith in any God is not only illogical but also dangerous. He argued that all religion is in fact evil and should thus be banished from the world. Contrary to Williams, Dawkins argues that God is not the source of our morality and he cites examples of religiously motivated crime and terrorism to emphasize the evils of religion.

The God Delusion proved to be a very controversial book with many critics; not just those with religious faith, but also other atheist evolutionary biologists. For instance, one of these critics, H. Allen Orr, University Professor and Shirley Cox Kearns Professor of Biology

at the University of Rochester, argues that Dawkins fails not only to engage at all with religious thought (e.g. from theologians and philosophers), but also that the book 'never squarely faces its opponents' (Orr 2007). Orr also heavily criticizes Dawkins for often citing anecdotal evidence to support his claims.

Whilst space restricts a fuller examination of both sides of the debate regarding the presence of religion in the public sphere, suffice to say here that even though secular or atheistic beliefs are not always based on fact, they continue to dominate the social science disciplines, including the sub-discipline of the sociology of sport.

A justification for using a Christian sociological approach to study sport?

'Muscular Christianity' was imbued in modern sports via the Victorian English public schools and subsequently spread throughout the British Empire and beyond by Christian athletic missionaries such as C.T. Studd and the 'Cambridge Seven' (see for example Mangan, 1984, 1986). Muscular Christian virtues of sport include: "teamwork, altruism, strength, self-control, justice, loyalty, wisdom, self-sacrifice, equality, courage, generosity, joy, honesty, tenacity, hard work, solidarity, peace, love (Philia, friendship love) and community spirit" (Watson and Parker 2013, 28). Some of the above ideals are also present in ancient Greek moral thought that has also had an influence on the development of modern sport, especially the Olympic Games (Reid and Holowchak 2011). Yet it is Christian values rather than those of any other faith are at the very foundations of some of today's global sports (see also Parker and Weir 2012; Watson, Weir and Friend 2005).

Whilst there is still at least some cultural residue of Muscular Christianity within sports today (cf. Meyer et al. 2015; Meyer and Umstattd Meyer 2017), it is also apparent that modern sports started to lose the Christian values upon which they were based almost as soon

as they had been codified, and this became more pronounced as the 20th century advanced. The following is a list of areas of research that have been conducted by sport sociologists, psychologists and philosophers on the ethical and moral problems that have become entrenched in sport: abuse of athletes, officials and others involved in sport; violence both on and off the field of play involving athletes, fans and others; political/national divisions; sectarianism; cheating; playing through pain and injury; overtraining; burnout; financial greed and corruption; use of performance enhancing drugs/doping (Watson and Parker 2013, 28-9). Various sociologists of sport have drawn upon secular theories to help them to provide explanations for the moral decline that has occurred in numerous sports. For instance, Overman (2011) uses Weber's rationalisation thesis to demonstrate how American elite sport became riddled with ethical and moral problems over the course of the 20th century as a consequence of its increasing professionalization, commodification and commercialization. Writing from a neo-Marxist perspective, Brohm (1978) referred to modern sport as 'a prison of measured time' arguing that athlete's bodies are treated as machines designed to produce entertainment and profits for others rather than for feelings of fun and pleasure for themselves. Lasch (1979) famously referred to 'the degradation of sport' in relation to the loss of the 'sacred dimension of play' in the pursuit of winning (as well as other aspects); and Walsh and Giulianotti (2007) have more recently referred to the ethical and moral problems in contemporary sport as 'the sporting mammon'.[4]

We argue that such problems are the indirect result of the secularisation of modern sport that Guttmann (1978) theorised was one of its seven defining characteristics. These problems are 'unintended consequences' (Elias 2000) of secularisation which has reduced the importance of playing sport for its inherent virtues (listed above). In many ways it is clear to see that the social and moral values imbued in modern sports by the English public schools under the influence of muscular Christianity, have been replaced by the 'win at all costs

mentality' or so called 'Lombardian ethic' (Baker 2007). Considering elite sport is one of the most publicly debated aspects of our everyday lives, we argue that it should not only be studied from a secular perspective but also a religious one. The concept of public religion helps justify the use of religious ideas in the study of public issues. Since we have argued, in agreement with the New Testament writers, that Christianity was always intended to be used as a public force for the good of society, we encourage sociologists of sport undertaking further research in this area to draw upon Biblical themes and theological ideas alongside secular sociological theories and concepts when studying the very public issues that arise in sport. For example, Adogame, Watson and Parker (2017) have suggested that 'social justice' issues in the sports-world, are ripe for analysis using both theological and social-scientific perspectives. Similarly, Gibbons and Braye (2017) used Biblical themes and sociological concepts together in their analysis of the narratives of Christian elite sports people using the kind of 'socio-theological' approach pioneered by Robin Gill (2012a; 2012b; 2013), an approach that previously had not been applied to the social scientific study of sport. We encourage researchers to use the Bible, the tools of Christian theology and sociological concepts together, so to inform analyses of modern sport from a Christian perspective.

Notes

1. Examples of other journal special editions from the conference include: *Sport, Ethics and Philosophy*, the *International Journal of the History of Sport* and *Practical Theology*.
2. This section and the one following it draw upon the arguments made in Gibbons (2016) 'Christianity as Public Religion in the Post-Secular 21st Century'.
3. We refer here to the version of the text published in London in 1881 in this essay.
4. In the New Testament 'Mammon' is referred to as material wealth or greed, and is often personified as a false idol (see for instance Matt. 6:19–21).

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